

Assessing the Validity of Brand Equity Constructs: A Comparison of Two Approaches

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Abstract

This paper tests both the internal and external validity of the Erdem and Swait (1998) brand equity framework using two measurement modelling approaches, namely the relatively new Best-Worst Scaling (BWS) method (Finn and Louviere, 1992; Marley and Louviere, 2005) and the more traditional Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) method. Data were collected from the Australian banking services sector. We find the measurement models derived from BWS outperformed the models based on CFA of the rating data in predicting both stated and real brand choices. The findings have implications for both academics and practitioners in brand equity measurement and management.

Keywords: Best-worst scaling, confirmatory factor analysis, brand equity measurement

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Introduction

A review of brand equity literature indicates that there are three dominant frameworks for understanding and measuring brand equity. They include (1) Aaker's (1991) framework, which is a managerial view of brand equity; (2) Keller's (1993) psychological, memory-based view of brand equity; and (3) Erdem and Swait's (1998) brand equity framework based on information economics and signalling theory.

In this paper we adopt the Erdem and Swait (1998) brand equity framework for the following three main reasons. First, the framework is based on a formal theory about consumer decision processes that provides a comprehensive and dynamic view of brand equity, which explains how various brand equity constructs are interrelated to create brand utility and then brand choice. Second, the framework has been repeatedly tested empirically (e.g., Erdem, Swait & Valenzuela, 2006; Wang, Menictas & Louviere, 2007). Third, the framework can be integrated with random utility theory (McFadden, 1974; Thurstone, 1927) to develop a practical way to model and measure brand equity. Following the Erdem and Swait (1998) Brand Equity Framework, we use six of the multi-item constructs to measure brand equity, namely (i) Brand Investments; (ii) Consistency; (iii) Credibility; (iv) Perceived Quality; (v) Perceived Risk; and (vi) Information Costs Saved.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) has been historically associated with the assessment of dimensionality, reliability and internal validity of measurement models. Typically CFA is conducted after exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and reliability analysis via Cronbach's (1951) coefficient alpha to ensure that the measurement items are internally consistent. The main purpose of CFA is to assess the psychometric properties of a multi-item measurement scale (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988; Nunally and Bernstein, 1994). However, measurement models formulated via this approach may not predict both stated and real brand choices in real markets. It is important to evaluate both the internal and external validity of any proposed brand equity framework before it can be generally accepted. Surprisingly, very little empirical research has been conducted to assess the predictive validities of various brand equity frameworks.

Louviere and his associates (Finn and Louviere, 1992; Marley and Louviere, 2005) have developed a different measurement item selection approach to CFA, known as Best Worst Scaling (BWS). BWS uses experimental designs to manipulate the presence or absence of items in the choice task. As such, we can use BWS to select measurement items to represent various constructs in the Erdem and Swait (1998) Brand Equity Framework. We can then compare this new BWS approach to that of traditional CFA for predicting both stated and real brand choices in real markets. To the best of our knowledge, this type of comparison has yet to be conducted. We believe this comparison deserves empirical investigation as it has the potential to advance our knowledge in the brand equity scale development literature.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: We first discuss our research method, including the BWS approach, the data collection process and the testing method for internal and external validity. Second, we discuss the conditional logit model results to examine the internal and external validity of our two methods. Finally, we discuss the implications and directions for further research.

Method

BWS Scaling

Typically, a BWS task asks respondents to choose the *best* and the *worst* option from a set of alternatives. The measurement item combinations in a BWS task are typically controlled by an experimental design. We used a Balanced Incomplete Block Design (BIBD) (Auger, Devinney & Louviere, 2007; Lee, Soutar et al., 2008) to construct the BWS tasks that comprised the brand equity multi-items that respondents evaluated.

In keeping with Churchill's (1979) scale development procedure, we defined the domain for each of the six constructs in the Erdem and Swait (1998) Brand Equity Framework via qualitative research. Eight qualitative focus group interviews were conducted to develop seven items for each of the six brand equity constructs. Table 1 contains three sample items for each brand equity construct. The experimental design that governed the alternatives in the BWS choice sets was a Youden BIBD (Coulburn and Dinitz, 2007). The *item numbers* in Table 1 come from the BIBD that was used. Each respondent was presented with seven BWS tasks for each of the six brand equity constructs. In each BWS task with three items, respondents were asked to indicate which item was the *best* statement and which item was the *worst* statement for each brand equity construct.

Data Collection Process

The quantitative data were collected using an online marketing research panel provider. The sample was collected on the basis of randomized selection in keeping with the population profile on the demographics. The survey consisted of (i) brand equity measurement items using seven-point Likert-type rating scales (to be used in the CFA measurement models); (ii) six BWS tasks; and (iii) demographic questions such as gender, age and income.

A total of 257 respondents completed the survey. The sample profile matched the general population in Australia on the variables of gender, age and personal income.

Item Reduction via CFA and BWS

The initial seven measurement items were reduced via CFA using a number of psychometric criteria, namely (i) construct convergent validity, established when average variance explained (AVE) > 0.50; (ii) construct discriminant validity, established when AVE > highest shared variance (HSV); and (iii) construct reliability (CR), established when CR > 0.70. Consistent with Finn and Louviere (1992), BWS measurement model items were reduced based on the rank order of the frequency of *best* minus the frequency of *worst*. In order to facilitate a fair comparison between CFA and BWS, we used the same number of items for the reduced BWS measurement models, as that for the reduced CFA measurement models.

Method of Comparing both Internal and External Validity

Respondents were asked to report their most recent brand choices in the Australian banking sector. These real brand choices allowed us to test the external validity of the three banking brands, namely Australian New Zealand Bank (ANZ), The Commonwealth Bank of Australia (CBA) and Westpac Banking Corporation (WBC). Note that in the BWS task, respondents were asked to indicate which item (not which bank) was the "best" and "worst" statement for each brand equity construct. We compare CFA versus BWS measurement models for both

internal and *external* validity using McFadden's (1974) conditional logit model. The independent variables are the means of either CFA or BWS selected items for each of the six constructs.

Table 1: Sample Items for the Brand Equity Constructs

Construct Number	Construct Name	Item Number	Item
1	BI	2	The company makes sure it's up to date.
1	BI	6	The company is a leader in using technology.
1	BI	4	The company is constantly evolving.
2	CO	1	The company's image is stable.
2	CO	4	The company's services are predictable.
2	CO	5	You know what to expect from the company.
3	CR	4	The company is open about its capabilities.
3	CR	7	The company has a good reputation.
3	CR	3	The company has a name you can trust.
4	PQ	3	The company's staff is of a high standard.
4	PQ	2	The company has stood the test of time.
4	PQ	1	The company is more exclusive than its competitors.
5	PR	7	The company has staying power.
5	PR	5	I'm sure about the company.
5	PR	2	I can count on the company being there in the future.
6	ICS	6	The company's website is easy to use.
6	ICS	1	You can quickly find out about the company.
6	ICS	7	Looking into the company is straightforward.
<i>Note:</i> BI = Brand Investments; CO = Consistency; CR = Credibility; PQ = Perceived Quality; PR = Perceived Risk; ICS = Information Costs Saved.			

We use two dependent variables. As each respondent was asked to rate each of three banking brands presented in the survey, we create our *first dependent variable*, where 1 represents the respondent's most preferred brand out of the three brands that were evaluated and 0 representing the other two brands. We use this dependent variable as the comparison between BWS and CFA item selection methods to test for *internal validity* because the data for this variable is generated within this study.

The *second dependent variable* is a dummy indicator variable for the respondent's most recent actual brand choice in the banking service sector. We use this dependent variable to test *external validity* because the data for this variable exists outside of this study pertaining to their actual daily transaction account choices among the three banking brands stated above.

Results

Table 2 presents the conditional logit models for the two dependent variables discussed earlier, namely brand most preferred to test internal validity and actual brand chosen to test external validity. In addition to the six brand equity constructs, we include two new independent variables in the conditional logit models in the form of alternative specific constants (ASCs), to represent the three banking brands.

As shown in Table 2 (CFA IV versus BWS IV), the log-likelihood for the BWS model is -59.04 and -67.48 for the CFA model. As such, the BWS measurement item selection method better predicts the most preferred brand when compared to the CFA item selection process. Both the AIC and the BIC values show that the BWS item selection predicts internal validity better than the CFA item selection approach.

Table 2: Conditional Logit Models for Testing Internal and External Validity

Parameters	CFA IV	BWS IV	CFA EV	BWS EV
BI	0.8630 (2.96)	1.1330 (2.25)	1.5469 (3.97)	1.7582 (4.37)
CO	0.1241 (0.35)	0.3499 (2.92)	0.3323 (1.59)	0.5755 (2.66)
CR	0.1035 (2.03)	2.1514 (3.14)	1.1389 (1.77)	2.3944 (3.73)
PQ	1.1110 (2.12)	3.1458 (4.33)	1.2559 (3.49)	1.3417 (3.73)
PR	2.9218 (5.07)	3.7809 (4.89)	1.3057 (4.18)	1.2699 (3.77)
ICS	2.0979 (4.97)	2.2408 (4.72)	3.0928 (6.44)	3.4563 (6.73)
ASC 1	-0.1759 (-0.51)	-0.1315 (-0.36)	0.4904 (2.12)	0.6368 (3.06)
ASC 2	0.7800 (2.32)	0.7892 (2.34)	1.1529 (3.66)	1.2935 (4.07)
Fit Statistics				
AIC	150.96	134.08	189.36	179.18
BIC	188.14	171.26	226.54	216.36
LL	-67.48	-59.04	-86.68	-81.59
<i>Note:</i> Values in parentheses are z-values (significant at the 0.05 level if the absolute value of z is greater than 1.96); BI = Brand Investments; CO = Consistency; CR = Credibility; PQ = Perceived Quality; PR = Perceived Risk; ICS = Information Costs Saved; ASC = Alternative Specific Constant; IV = Internal Validity; EV = External Validity; and LL = Log-Likelihood.				

It can also be seen from Table 2 (CFA EV versus BWS EV), the log-likelihood for the BWS model is -81.59 and -86.68 for the CFA model. As such, the BWS measurement item selection method better predicts actual brand choice when compared to the CFA item selection process. Both the AIC and the BIC values show that the BWS item selection predicts external validity better than the CFA item selection approach.

Discussions and Conclusions

This paper has compared the predictive performance between the new BWS approach and the more traditional CFA measurement model approach. Although measurement models built by the traditional CFA method may satisfy various psychometric criteria for model fit such as coefficient alpha, convergent validity, and discriminant validity, our results suggest that the CFA method may not possess either internal or external validity as well as the new BWS method.

As noted by Cohen (2003), BWS has been found to overcome response style bias associated with the CFA method due to CFA's reliance on the use of rating scales. When using rating scales, each respondent may use the rating scale in their own unique way. Respondents are notorious for rating measurement items very rapidly, using simplification heuristics so that they may speed through the task. Some respondents may use the extreme ends of the rating scale, whilst others spread their ratings across the entire scale range, yet others may rate the scale towards the centre of the scale. This may and oftentimes does, result in low discrimination amongst rating scales.

In contrast, BWS requires respondents to make trade-offs amongst the measurement items. By doing so, we force respondents to evaluate the measurement items in exactly the same way, thus avoiding response style bias. As a result, the BWS approach is gaining popularity in the commercial as well as the academic marketing research community.

Although we found that BWS outperformed CFA in both internal and external validity tests, we are not suggesting that the BWS method is a substitute for the CFA method as we believe the latter has its rightful place in theory testing (Bagozzi and Yi, 1989; Bollen, 1989). As the first study of its kind, this paper provides a starting point for further comparative research in this area. To enhance the generalisability of our research findings, it is worthwhile to replicate the study in various research contexts, such as different product categories and different cultural settings. Another avenue for future research is to compare BWS with item response theory (IRT) or Rasch modelling which overcomes measurement invariance problem associated with CFA (Andrich 1988). Nevertheless, we believe that in commercial applications BWS can play a very important role to predict real market choices. This is because BWS requires fewer assumptions and is simple to develop and test when compared to CFA or Rasch modelling.

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